

Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Project

FY 2011 Request for Applications

Application Submission Deadline: July 15, 2011



U.S. Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Project

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.324

DATES: Applications must be received by close of business on Friday, July 15, 2011 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding. Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is requesting comments regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and will be used to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). This section requires the Secretary to solicit and consider input on a current RFA from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education and extension for use in formulating future RFAs for competitive programs. Written stakeholder comments on this RFA should be submitted in accordance with the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice.

Written stakeholder comments should be submitted by mail to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: RFP-OEP@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Afghanistan Extension Project RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Foreign Agricultural Service, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) announces the availability of funds and requests applications for the Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Project (AAEP) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011. NIFA is requesting applications from U.S. land-grant universities to assist Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) as they attempt to deliver more effective, demand-driven extension services to producers and other rural clientele in selected areas of the country. The project will focus on professional development training for extension staff, primarily at the provincial and district levels, in order to increase extension's ability to meet farmers' needs and ultimately build public confidence in MAIL's capacity to provide critical services. Anticipated results of the project include a cadre of extension staff with the technical expertise and appropriate methodologies to effectively extend information and

knowledge; increased public accessibility to, and use of, government extension services; development of extension training modules and educational materials based on high-priority needs; targeted agricultural universities, vocational high schools, and technical institutes with increased capacity to prepare future extension personnel; improved services for women working in the agricultural sector; and a pluralistic approach to extension that responds to farmers needs for research-based technologies, builds upon the innovations of Afghanistan farmers, and promotes coordination among the various entities providing extension-related services.

In FY 2011, approximately \$14 million is available for support of this program. All funds related to this project must be expended, and all activities must be completed, no later than September 30, 2014.

This notice identifies AAEP objectives, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for funding.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I-FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION	5
A. Legislative Authority and Background	5
B. Purpose and Priorities	5
C. Program Area Description	6
PART II—AWARD INFORMATION	12
PART II—AWARD INFORMATION	12
A. Available Funding	12
B. Types of Applications	12
C. Project Duration	12
PART III-ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION	13
A. Eligible Applicants	13
B. Cost Sharing or Matching	13
PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION	14
A. Electronic Application Package	14
B. Content and Form of Application Submission	15
C. Submission Date and Time	17
D. Funding Restrictions	18
E. Other Submission Requirements	18
PART V-APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS.....	20
A. General.....	20
B. Evaluation Criteria	20
C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality	21
D. Organizational Management Information	22
PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION	23
A. General.....	23
B. Award Notice	23
C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements	24
D. Reporting Requirements	25
PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT	26
PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION	27
A. Access To Review Information	27
B. Use of Funds; Changes	27
C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards	28
D. Regulatory Information.....	28
E. Definitions.....	28

PART I-FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

In accordance with Section 632(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2392(a)) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010 (P.L. 111-117), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in order to utilize the unique resources of USDA and its land-grant institution partners to strengthen Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock extension system, transferred funds to USDA. To learn more about USAID support for program and project activity in Afghanistan visit <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov>.

In accordance with 7 U.S.C. 3291(a) and 7 U.S.C. 3318(a) the Secretary of Agriculture has the authority to enter into agreements in furtherance of the purposes of this program. Furthermore, the Secretary has delegated these authorities to the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE) and the Administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service, respectfully. On behalf of the Department and the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), NIFA will coordinate and administer the Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Program (AAEP) activities using a portion of the funds previously described. Starting in FY 2011, NIFA plans to use these funds to engage U.S. universities to work with Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) and the Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (DAILs) at the provincial and district levels to develop and improve agricultural extension services. Initial efforts will take place in three areas of the country, expanding to other regions once approaches and educational products have been field-tested and improved upon to maximize effectiveness.

B. Purpose and Priorities

There is no questioning the importance of Afghanistan's agricultural sector and the critical role it must play in the economic development and overall stability of the country. MAIL Minister Mohammad Asif Rahimi claims that "Agriculture will determine whether Afghanistan will succeed or fail." Improvements in the agricultural sector will have significant, positive impacts on problems ranging from poverty and unemployment to food insecurity and environmental degradation. A key component for agricultural development in Afghanistan is an effective extension system that provides farmers and other rural clientele with the knowledge and technologies they need to increase production, reduce losses, identify markets, minimize risks, and manage and sustain limited natural resources.

At its peak over thirty years ago, agricultural extension in Afghanistan was considerably larger in terms of staff numbers and more effective in providing services to rural clientele than it is today. By all accounts, including the admission of senior MAIL officials, the system has broken down following years of war, civil unrest, and political neglect. MAIL estimates the official number of extension personnel at the provincial and district levels nationwide to be about 650, but claims the actual number of field staff is likely closer to 300-400. Those that are employed as extension staff are, for the most part, poorly trained, underpaid, and lack both the research-based knowledge and the resources (such as transportation) to provide services, even if they have the motivation to do so. A 2009 report commissioned by MAIL and conducted by the Department for International Development (DFID) states that *less than 2%* of farmers surveyed in 2007 had contact with *any* agricultural extension provider. Those farmers also present some unique

challenges as they are mostly illiterate, resistant to change, and often leery of external assistance. Add in a lack of access to good roads, poor access to markets, a weak communication infrastructure, gender inequities, weak linkages between research and extension, donor programs that often hinder self-reliance and sometimes undermine Afghanistan services, and one begins to comprehend the considerable obstacles to reinvigorating a vibrant and responsive extension system.

There is, however, much reason for optimism. Perhaps foremost among these is the leadership support for extension within MAIL, from the Minister in Kabul to the district-level extension agents. As part of an “Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems” (AKIS) approach, MAIL has embarked upon the development of a nationwide extension system that is “demand-driven, participatory, comprehensive, farmer-centered, economically-oriented, gender sensitive, and environmentally and culturally sustainable.” Initially, focused on 50 districts around the country, MAIL envisions AKIS as a means to increase farmer knowledge, improve productivity and income, foster the stewardship of natural resources, create employment, and help transition from a predominantly subsistence agriculture to a more commercial one. MAIL has already begun to commit resources for additional staff and infrastructure in those districts and has plans to expand to new districts annually, with nationwide coverage within 4-6 years.

Similarly, the international community working in Afghanistan is increasingly recognizing the importance of agricultural extension and its necessary links to research and education. USAID is in the process of developing a large research and extension program. The Dutch have made a long-term commitment to building capacity in agricultural high schools and post-secondary vocational institutes. The U.S. Army National Guard has placed Agribusiness Development Teams (ADTs) in nine provinces in Afghanistan and, although their activities are very broad in scope, most could be categorized as extension. USDA also has more than 50 agricultural advisors serving on Provincial Reconstruction Teams throughout the country. As outlined below, it is imperative that the U.S. universities selected for this USDA project coordinate their activities with these other agencies/organizations working in related areas. There is a tremendous opportunity to complement and build upon one another’s efforts, so close communication and collaboration will be required from the outset.

C. Program Area Description

USDA intends to award a single cooperative agreement to a U.S. land-grant university to form and lead a consortium of three additional U.S. land-grant universities that will assist MAIL as they strive to improve agricultural extension services in Afghanistan. Initial capacity-building activities will focus on Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAILs) in the provinces of Herat, Balkh and Nangarhar. In the early stages of the project, emphasis will be on pilot districts in those three provinces that are included in MAIL’s AKIS program. (Fourteen of the fifty pilot districts identified by MAIL are found in these three provinces). In addition to drawing upon the resources of the lead institution and its partner consortium universities, at least 20% of the personnel budget for this project should be devoted to obtaining faculty expertise from U.S. universities or colleges not included in the consortium. This will help ensure broader representation of U.S. institutions and increase the pool of qualified, interested, and available personnel to serve in-country. Participation from minority-serving institutions is encouraged in the consortium and as additional personnel resources.

The university consortium selected for this project will provide technical training to Afghanistan extension personnel, as well as training in methodologies to effectively transfer new knowledge and technologies to farmers. Given high illiteracy, an aversion to risk, and a lack of trust in the current extension system, planning and delivering appropriate educational materials and programs will not be a simple task. Considerable attention will need to be given to the level of technology promoted and the means used to convey it. While there are certainly opportunities to introduce innovative practices, too often development project activities in Afghanistan have missed the mark, aiming too high and misreading the basic needs and learning competencies of rural Afghans. Identifying effective forms of communicating information, whether through demonstrations, workshops, printed materials, radio, etc., will be a critical factor in the project's success. In order to demonstrate an understanding of the intended end users' needs and educational level, universities applying to this RFA will be required to submit a sample training curriculum, fact sheets, and/or other documents that could be used to build extension staff capacity or educate rural Afghans (see Part IV, Section B for additional information on application submission).

The consortium will be expected to achieve local buy-in and ownership for training activities through a collaborative planning process with MAIL and DAIL officials. While this collaboration will take some time to build, the consortium will be under pressure to produce some quick results to impact farmer performance in the short-term. U.S. universities will need to identify immediate needs in the selected provinces/districts and develop training programs and other educational means to address those needs.

The overall emphasis of this project will be to support the extension services provided by the Afghanistan government, not to set up a parallel system or in any way replace or circumvent government programs. Creative ways to "brand" MAIL/DAIL services as clearly being provided by the Afghanistan government should be pursued.

To help achieve longer-term sustainability for extension in Afghanistan, attention must also be paid to ensuring that qualified Afghanistan men and women are educated and trained to serve at national, provincial, and district levels. As part of the AKIS program, MAIL intends to increase the number of extension staff working in pilot districts. Some of the candidates for these positions may come out of the agricultural universities, including those institutions in Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Jalalabad. Given the remote locations and low salary levels, however, it will be difficult to attract college-educated personnel to serve in district extension services. A more likely place from which to draw these future extension workers may well be the agricultural high schools and institutes (grades 13-14). As mentioned above, the Netherlands has taken the lead in developing agricultural education programs at these secondary and post-secondary levels, what they are referring to as, "Technical and Vocational Education and Training" (TVET). Although the U.S. university consortium should seek ways to collaborate with the provincial agricultural universities (e.g. curriculum development for extension, certificate courses, faculty development), they should not overlook the agricultural high schools and institutes as potential partners and providers of extension staff in the near future.

As mentioned briefly above, USAID will be implementing an extensive, well-funded project to strengthen research and extension capacity in Afghanistan. Although still in the planning stages, the project will likely begin in 2011 or 2012. In order to develop complementary efforts and add value to one another's efforts, the university consortium (and any of its collaborating partners) must seek ways to effectively coordinate activities with USAID. Many of the resources developed as part of this USDA extension project should be beneficial to USAID as they strive to build professional competencies of extension staff and foster linkages with research. To the degree that USAID decides to support needs related to infrastructure development, communication technologies, long-term degree training and/or competitive grants, there will be ample opportunities for mutually-beneficial activities. This will not happen, however, without a collaborative planning process from the outset and continued communication and coordination throughout the duration of both projects. This collaboration will be a high priority for both USDA and USAID and the consortium should expect an emphasis on joint planning to begin soon after the award has been made.

Extension approaches, materials, and training modules that the consortium develops for capacity building at the provincial and district levels should be made available to serve a wider extension audience during the life of the project. Given the relatively small numbers of staff now directly engaged with extension at MAIL and the DAILs, it should be feasible to provide regional workshops or access to training modules, for example, to all provincial and district extension workers throughout the country. A description of this "scale-up" of pilot efforts to a larger audience should be included in the project narrative outlined below and accompanied by a timetable indicating this phased approach.

The three provinces selected for extension assistance represent different agro-ecological zones in Afghanistan. Technical training needs in such areas as dryland agriculture, crop production, horticulture, animal health and nutrition, soil fertility, farm machinery (maintenance and repair), disease and pest control, farm management, etc., will vary according to the situation and needs in the various provinces. One consistent and high priority area is irrigation and water resource management. USAID is planning a major effort in this area that could include a component focusing on increasing MAIL's capacity to deliver extension services to farmers on irrigation practices and watershed management. If this occurs, the consortium selected to implement the AAEP should both benefit from this related project and seek ways to add value to it.

The consortium will need to identify effective ways to increase outreach efforts to rural women in Afghanistan. Women play a critical role in Afghanistan's agricultural sector and extension services to date have not adequately served their needs. Cultural differences, such as gender segregated training workshops, will need to be understood and considered in planning and implementing project activities. Afghanistan's Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy (ARDSS) calls for more "gender-responsive extension services," especially in such areas as livestock and poultry production. The strategy goes on to recommend tailoring services to the needs of women producers by training more female extension/marketing agents and facilitating the establishment of women's producer groups. MAIL also has an office devoted to Women Extension Services that has received support from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. Recognizing the need to engage women more, one of MAIL's stated objectives is "to promote added value to the agricultural products with

emphasis on value chain analysis and market access *from a gender perspective.*” Recently, the Director General for Extension at MAIL stated they currently have 30 women staff working in fifteen provinces, with intentions of increasing that number under AKIS.

For many women and other small-scale farmers, it may be necessary to facilitate the formation of organizations at the local level (e.g., self-help groups, producer associations), a process sometimes referred to as “building social capital.” Engaging local and/or international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with extensive on-the-ground experience is a potentially effective way to help develop these groups and link them to government extension services. Such groups tend to be more effective when they are formed around common interests at the local level, rather than artificially-created with a top-down approach. Due consideration will also be required to involve tribal leadership to promote community input into the planning process and longer-term stakeholder support for services provided.

U.S. universities have been working in Afghanistan for several years now and applicants to this RFA are advised to consider lessons learned from agricultural development projects to date. These projects include Advancing Afghan Agriculture Alliance (A4); the Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer (AWATT) program; Pastoral Engagement, Adaptation, and Capacity Enhancement (PEACE); and the Research in Alternative Livelihoods Fund (RALF). Examples of other agricultural assistance projects include IDEA-NEW (implemented by Mercy Corps, DAI and ACDI-VOCA); Roots of Peace; IFHope; and, the World Bank’s Horticulture and Livestock Productivity (HLP) Project. While all of these may not represent potential partners, they should be considered as valued resources and opportunities to build upon.

Security concerns and the resulting difficulty in assessing needs, implementing local training programs, and following up to measure impact will be a significant challenge. Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar were selected, in part, due to the relative secure environments in those areas. USDA in Washington and Kabul, in collaboration with the U.S. State Department and U.S. government security personnel in Afghanistan, will provide information to the consortium on an ongoing basis concerning the security situation, but universities will be primarily responsible for precautionary measures to ensure the safety of their personnel. Universities should provide all staff working in-country with security orientations and updates, as well as living and working conditions in Afghanistan that minimize the risk of violent incidents. This is a country undergoing armed conflict and terrorist activities that include threats and hostile attacks on foreigners. U.S. universities have been working successfully in Afghanistan for several years and have learned to adapt to the insecure environment; however, the need for caution and vigilance cannot be overstated.

The lead university selected for this project will be responsible for proposal development, financial tracking and reporting, subcontracting/subawarding with consortium universities, reaching out to obtain appropriate expertise from non-consortium institutions, managing and/or facilitating all aspects of supported activities including intra-consortial coordination and arrangements, travel of project personnel, quarterly progress and financial reports, and other requested reporting to NIFA and FAS, and preparation of a final close-out report (see Part VI, D. for more information about reporting). In addition, the lead institution will be required to describe in detail how they intend to develop a detailed performance measurement plan in order

to monitor and evaluate project progress. Measuring the impacts of training and capacity building activities is difficult to measure here in the U.S., let alone in an environment where security concerns sometimes limit field-level evaluations. The consortium is encouraged to work with an external institution or organization to evaluate program impacts and develop lessons learned and good practices in the design and implementation of extension program activities. In doing so, the consortium should consider building Afghanistan's capacity to develop performance measurement plans and carry out evaluative assessments. Regardless of the approach used to capture results on the ground, MAIL needs to be involved in the process of determining project objectives and what constitutes success. Applications should include examples of realistic project outcomes (identifying short- and long-term outcomes where appropriate) and the necessary inputs and activities needed to achieve them. The activities outlined in the project proposal should be part of an overall, coherent strategy leading to a set of achievable objectives and goals. The project's final performance monitoring and evaluation plan will be developed in cooperation and coordination with USDA. Several development efforts in Afghanistan to date have consisted of a scattered approach of varied activities – although often successful as isolated events, these activities have inadequately advanced the agricultural sector towards larger objectives.

As described above, the initial project emphases should be directed at extension in the three targeted provinces and AKIS pilot districts. In doing so, Kabul-based MAIL officials must be engaged throughout the planning and implementation of the project. Key staff within MAIL include, but are not limited to, those working under the Deputy Minister for Technical Affairs and the Director General for Extension. Existing relationships between MAIL in Kabul and DAIL staff at the provincial level are weak. The flow of funding, as well as the exchange of programmatic information and planning priorities, does not currently move well between the two. The U.S. university consortium selected for this project will need to utilize shared objectives to help foster an improved working relationship among national, provincial, and district extension staff. Kabul University also plays a national role for higher education, so faculty there should be included as appropriate to enhance provincial agricultural universities' ability to strengthen extension

This project, intended to improve MAIL's capacity to provide more effective agricultural advisory services, is limited by time and funding. Even when working in countries with more funding over a longer period of time (and without many of the challenges listed above), nationwide, systematic improvements are difficult to achieve. Just as it takes a long time and considerable trust to change a farmer's behavior, it is equally difficult to positively impact a large public system – especially one that has been neglected for years. For this reason, expectations and goals will need to be kept realistic. Even more importantly, if our efforts are to have any chance of continuing after the project ends, MAIL must be fully engaged and integrated in the project every step of the way. To the degree that extension is implemented as a public system, the Government of Afghanistan and the public-at-large will need to believe in the value of extension, see the benefits of investing in it, and commit to providing the infrastructure and staff development needed to make it successful and sustainable.

Finally, the consortium is advised to clearly describe and justify institutional partnerships, with appropriate levels of coordination specified between the lead institution and other partner

institutions in the U.S. and Afghanistan. Special attention should be given to collaboration with other U.S. government programs and those of other donor nations. A clear and convincing plan should be provided that describes how the consortium will draw upon expertise from other U.S. universities not included in the consortium.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

In FY 2011, approximately \$14 million is available to support AAEP. NIFA expects to competitively award one cooperative agreement to a U.S. land-grant institution that will lead a consortium of three additional U.S. land-grant universities. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. Funding levels may be adjusted based on the technical review of submissions. All funds awarded for this project must be expended, and all activities must be completed, no later than September 30, 2014.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html.

B. Types of Applications

This is a new program in FY 2011; therefore all applications must be submitted as “new.” All applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

C. Project Duration

The maximum project period should not extend beyond FY 2014 (September 30, 2014). Applicants should state in their proposal the amount of time anticipated to complete the project, and justify the proposed project duration with a graphical or narrative timeline. Thus, a project originally proposed for 1 year duration is eligible for up to two no-cost extension years, a project originally proposed for 2-year duration is eligible for only a single no-cost extension year, and a project originally proposed for 3-year duration is ineligible for a no-cost extension.

PART III-ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Only land-grant institutions are eligible to receive AAEP awards. Eligible land-grant institutions include all 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant institutions. All consortia members must be land-grant institutions. The lead institution and consortium members may subcontract to organizations/institutions not eligible to apply provided such organizations/institutions are necessary for the conduct of the project.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria. However, the lead and consortium institutions are required to contribute resources to the accomplishment of project objectives and are encouraged to cost share in order to maximize programmatic impact by limiting indirect cost to ten percent (10%) of total federal funds awarded. A detailed line item breakdown of cost sharing contributions should be identified in the "Budget Justification." **Institutions submitting an application with indirect costs greater than ten percent (10%) of total federal funds requested will not be penalized, as long as they do not exceed their federally negotiated indirect cost rate. However, NIFA reserves the right to negotiate indirect costs associated with a submitted application.**

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. **Applicants are advised to submit early to the Grants.gov system.**

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, it is suggested that the PD/PI first contact an Authorized Representative (AR)(also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grant.gov. If the organization is not prepared (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed PRIOR to submitting an application. It can take as much as two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations the AR should go to **“Get Registered” on the Grants.gov left navigation bar (or go to http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov. A quick reference guide listing the steps is available as a 4-page PDF document at the following website: <http://www.grants.gov/section910/Grants.govRegistrationBrochure.pdf>.**

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

1. In order to access, complete and submit applications, applicants must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov. This software is essential to apply for NIFA Federal assistance awards. For basic system requirements and download instructions, please see http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp. To verify that you have a compatible version of Adobe Reader, Grants.gov established a test package that will assist you in making that determination. Grants.gov Adobe Versioning Test Package: <http://www.grants.gov/applicants/AdobeVersioningTestOnly.jsp>.
2. The application package must be obtained via Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov>, click on “Apply for Grants” in the left-hand column, click on **“Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Instructions,”** enter the funding opportunity number, USDA-NIFA-EXCA-003453, in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This Guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If assistance is needed to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms), refer to resources available on the Grants.gov Web site first (<http://grants.gov/>). Grants.gov assistance is also available as follows:

Grants.gov customer support

Toll Free: 1-800-518-4726

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [Federal Holidays](#).

Email: support@grants.gov

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Electronic applications should be prepared following Parts V and VI of the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed in order to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., portable document format) in Part III section 3. of the Guide. ANY PROPOSALS CONTAINING NON-PDF DOCUMENTS WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. With documented prior approval, resubmitted applications will be accepted until close of business on the closing date in the RFA.

If you do not own PDF-generating software, Grants.gov provides online tools to assist applicants. Users will find a link to “Convert Documents to PDF” on <http://grants.gov/assets/PDFConversion.pdf>.

For any questions related to the preparation of an application please review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable request for applications. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:

- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7:00 am – 5:00 pm Eastern Time, excluding Federal holidays.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

2. R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 4. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. **Project Summary/Abstract.** The summary should include the relevance of the project to the goals of AAEP. The Project Summary is limited to 250 words.

b. Field 8. **Project Narrative.**

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed **25** pages of written text regardless of whether it is single or double spaced and up to **10** additional pages for figures and tables. This maximum (**35** pages) has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. Reviewers will not be required to review material in excess of this limit. Appendices are not counted toward the Project Narrative page limit. (Appendices to the Project Narrative are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. The addition of appendices should not be used to circumvent the page limit).

It is strongly encouraged that prospective applicants carefully review the project description outlined above and the evaluation criteria in Part V, B prior to preparing their applications.

The Project Narrative must include descriptions of the following:

- The long-term goal(s) and supporting objectives of the proposed activities;
- The capabilities of the lead university and each consortium institution as they relate specifically to the agricultural extension development needs in Afghanistan and the overall objectives of this project;
- The proposed project activities in the sequence in which they will be implemented, including those shorter-term activities most likely to show more immediate results;
- Stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation;
- How the consortium intends to engage MAIL as the primary stakeholder;
- How the consortium will collaborate with other donor organizations, international and local NGOs, Afghan universities, high schools, and vocational institutions;
- A plan to engage faculty expertise from non-consortium U.S. universities or colleges;
- Approaches to foster gender equity and build capacity for women in extension;
- Efforts to expand (“scale-up”) initial efforts in pilot districts to impact extension services on a more regional or national level;
- How monitoring and evaluation will be performed that includes:
 - Anticipated outcomes (both short- and long-term) as a result of project activities;
 - Plans for the development of a Performance Management Plan;
 - Means of obtaining stakeholder input into defining and measuring success;
 - How, when, and by whom performance measurement data will be collected and analyzed; and
 - Evaluation methods for identifying lessons learned and good practices and measuring program impact.
- Potential obstacles and how they will be overcome or minimized; and
- Efforts to increase the likelihood that project results will be sustained over the long-term.

Additional Required Documentation (to be included as an appendix)

In order to demonstrate that applicants understand both the technical needs and educational level of extension's clientele in Afghanistan, please include an illustrative example of a potential training-related product, e.g., curriculum, lesson plan, training module, fact sheet, media strategy, etc. For purposes of this application process, the document should be in English.

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

5. R&R Personal Data – As noted in Part V, 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

6. R&R Budget

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This form (accompanied by the required Budget Justification attachment) contains the itemized listing and description of your project's budget. Complete all applicable fields.

7. Supplemental Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. The current and pending support form is required for all key personnel. This project should be listed in the "pending" section with a time commitment no less than the percentage of salary committed on the budget. The total of current and pending projects should not exceed 100% and all projects listed must have time commitments associated with them.

a. Field 2. Program Code. Enter the program code name (i.e., enter "Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Project") and the program code (i.e., enter "AAEP").

C. Submission Date and Time

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on July 15, 2011 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

Applicants who have problems with the submission of an application to Grants.gov are encouraged to FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.

Correspondence regarding submitted applications will be sent using e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received a confirmation message from NIFA within 30 days of submission of the application, please contact the agency contact identified in Part VII of this RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

AAEP award funds may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities. AAEP award funds may not be used to support the salaries of U.S. government employees. The purchase of equipment is limited to that which is required for training, teaching, extension demonstration, and other relevant project activities.

E. Other Submission Requirements

The applicant should follow the submission requirements noted in the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.”

Described below are the requirements for successful submission of an application, all of the following steps must be met for an application to be considered for peer review:

- 1) Meeting the deadline: To electronically send the application to Grants.gov the submit button is hit, which triggers a date and time stamp on the application. The date and time stamp is used to determine whether the application was received by Grants.gov before the deadline, which is prior to close of business (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on July 15, 2011. An application submitted or resubmitted after the deadline is late. Consideration of late applications is only given in extenuating circumstances (e.g., natural disasters, confirmed Grants.gov outage) with proper documentation and support of the Agency Contact (see Part VII). The occurrence of one of these situations does not automatically ensure that a late application will be accepted. If an applicant wants a late application considered under an extenuating circumstance, the applicant should contact the Agency Contact accordingly.
- 2) Successful Grants.gov validation: The Grants.gov system performs a limited check of the application, and applicants are notified by Grants.gov of the outcome of the initial review. Applications meeting Grants.gov requirements are made available to the funding agency for further processing. Applications that fail Grants.gov validation may be resubmitted to Grants.gov if the original agency deadline has not passed. (Note that the Grants.gov system may allow applications to be submitted after the deadline has passed, but the application is considered late by NIFA.)
- 3) Successful Agency validation: NIFA staff perform precursory review of the application. The agency validation process includes, for example, meeting eligibility requirements

and following agency application guidelines (e.g., formatting, page limitations, limits on budget requests). Applicants are notified by NIFA of the outcome of this review

PART V-APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

Each application will be evaluated in a 2-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel.

Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant international development and agricultural extension fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) the level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant domestic and international extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (d) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (e) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to the intended beneficiaries of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The following evaluation criteria and weights will be used to evaluate proposals submitted for funding (weight is in parentheses; 100 total points):

(a) Proposed Approach and Start-up Activities - Does the approach demonstrate a clear understanding of agricultural extension in Afghanistan and the need for collaborative planning with MAIL? Are planned activities and their intended impacts achievable during the life of the project? Do the implementation strategies adequately consider the current and potential capacity of project beneficiaries? Is there a demonstrated ability to conduct development programs under complex and constrained conditions such that high value results are attained? Are there plans for effectively impacting MAIL's extension capacity that will have tangible impacts in the first three months of the project? (20 points)

(b) Institutional Capacity Building and Staff Development - Will the proposed program ultimately lead to an increase in the quality and quantity of MAIL's extension services? Do the technical areas identified for training reflect local priorities in the targeted provinces/districts? Do plans sufficiently address the issues related to the needs of rural women? Are proposed extension methodologies for transferring knowledge appropriate, relevant, and realistic? After initial capacity building in selected areas, is there a phased approach to expand successful efforts to other parts of Afghanistan? How will agricultural universities, high schools, and vocational institutions be used to enhance project objectives and produce a cadre of trained extension workers for the future? (30 points)

(c) Collaboration and Cooperation – Are institutional partnerships clearly described and justified, with appropriate levels of coordination specified between the lead institution and other partner institutions in the U.S. and Afghanistan? Is adequate attention given to collaboration with other U.S. government programs, (e.g., USAID, ADTs, and PRT advisors) and those of other donor nations? Is there a clear and convincing plan as to how the consortium will draw upon expertise from other U.S. universities not included in the consortium? How will linkages to Afghanistan educational institutions enhance project effectiveness? Will the partnerships clearly contribute to attaining AAEP goals? *(15 points)*

(d) Budget and Cost-effectiveness - This criterion relates to the extent to which the total budget adequately supports project objectives and is cost-effective. Is the budget request clear and adequately justified? Are costs reasonable and necessary? Will the budget be adequate to carry out proposed activities? Does the budget maximize value per dollar of USDA support? *(10 points)*

(e) Personnel Resources - This criterion relates to the number and qualifications of the key persons who will carry out the planning process. Are designated project personnel qualified to carry out a successful process? Are there sufficient numbers of personnel associated with the planning and implementation processes to achieve the stated objectives and anticipated outcomes? *(5 points)*

(f) Institutional Commitment - Is there evidence that the lead and all partnering institutions attribute a high priority to project implementation, that the process and overall goals of the project are linked to the achievement of consortia members' long-term strategies? Will the project have reasonable access to other needed resources such as equipment, facilities, computer services, library, and other support resources? *(5 points)*

(g) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)– Is there a strategy in place that will effectively measure performance and impact? How will monitoring be used to regularly provide feedback and information to project management staff to ensure activities are effective and lead to the desired program results? Are the individuals involved in monitoring and evaluation skilled in rigorous evaluation strategies and procedures? Are there plans to involve a wide breadth of stakeholders in the M&E process in the initial development of the performance management system and throughout the life of the project? Does the proposal include activities to help build the capacity of MAIL to design and implement a results-based performance management system? How will data be gathered at the district and farm levels? Are examples provided for realistic measurement indicators that match overall project objectives? *(15 points)*

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be

determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 6400 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 648, Falls Church, Virginia 22042. Phone: (703) 532-2300. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants. At the end of the fiscal year, names of panelists will be made available in such a way that the panelists cannot be identified with the review of any particular application.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as-needed basis, as part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. NIFA will provide copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors which may exclude an applicant from receiving Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of NIFA shall make award to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of NIFA as the effective date of the agreement shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the agreement effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR).

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the following:

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the Director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number assigned by the Department;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Director during the project period;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA award terms and conditions);

(10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to applications considered for review and to agreements awarded under this RFA. These include, but are not limited to:

2 CFR Part 215—Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-110).

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt management.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

7 CFR Part 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of Federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3019 – USDA implementation of Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations

7 CFR Part 3021—Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance).

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations.

7 CFR Part 3407—NIFA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR Part 3430—NIFA procedures to implement Competitive and Noncompetitive Nonformula Federal Assistance Programs—General Award Administrative Provisions

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) –prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in Federally assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 *et seq.* –Bayh-Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in Federally assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

D. Reporting Requirements

The recipient shall submit initial project information, as well as quarterly and annual reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system that facilitates both recipient submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally-funded projects. This will include quarterly financial reports and technical progress reports. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions.

A Quarterly Performance and Financial Report must be submitted within 30 days after the end of each calendar quarter during the period of performance of this agreement. In general, the program report should include a summary of the overall progress toward project objectives, current problems, or unusual developments. In addition, projections for the upcoming quarter's program activities, along with any other pertinent information may be included. The financial status report (SF-425) and a detailed line-item expenditures report should support the reported program activity.

An Annual Performance Report must be submitted within 90 days after the completion of the first year of the project, and annually thereafter during the life of the grant. Generally, the Annual Performance Reports should include a summary of the overall progress toward project objectives, current problems or unusual developments, the next year's activities, and any other information that is pertinent to the ongoing project or which may be specified in the terms and conditions of the award.

Given the high visibility of U.S. assistance projects in Afghanistan, there is a critical need to provide progress reports on a regular and frequent basis. Such reports should include descriptions of activities as they relate to achieving the overall objective of building MAIL's capacity to deliver effective extension services. In addition to success stories, reports should include problems encountered and/or external factors that constrain progress towards planned objectives. USDA will make a concerted effort to centralize reporting requirements in order to minimize requests from multiple sources, but the consortium implementing this project should anticipate information requests from government agencies (USDA, USAID, Department of State, etc.) located in Washington, DC and the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact Michael McGirr, National Program Leader, Center for International Programs, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2203; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2203; telephone: (202) 205-3739; fax: (202) 690-2355; e-mail: mmcgirr@nifa.usda.gov .

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, the awardee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

2. Changes in Project Plans

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the agency contact.

b. Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.

d. Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. Changes in Project Period: Any extension of time granted by NIFA shall be conditioned upon prior request by the awardee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of award.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Definitions

Please refer to 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions, for the applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.